



HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Ministry of Migration & Asylum

Special Secretariat for the Protection of UAMs

NATIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE MECHANISM

A safety net for unaccompanied children identified in precarious living conditions



**Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors –
Ministry of Migration and Asylum**

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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



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Cover photo:

An unaccompanied child near the railway station of Thessaloniki, Northern Greece.

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Preamble

At the initiative of the Prime Minister, the “No Child Alone” scheme was launched in 2019, which eventually resulted to the establishment, in 2020, of a state authority responsible for all issues pertaining to the protection of unaccompanied children in Greece, the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUAM). Ever since, all competent stakeholders, namely the State, local authorities, civil society actors and our European and UN partners, mobilized their human and financial resources to strengthen the capacity and responsiveness of the Special Secretariat aiming, first and foremost, at addressing the needs and the rights of thousands of refugee children in need of protection.

It was hard to anticipate at this early stage, that the true passion, expertise and commitment of all who joined forces and are now working hand in hand in a genuine public-private-partnership, would gradually built a formidable task force that provides concrete deliverables and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across the entire spectrum of child protection: namely, early identification, assessment of the best interests of the child, referrals and transfers, emergency and long term accommodation, psycho-social, administrative and legal support, education and integration soft skills, vocational training etc. Hence, even though initially the SSPUAM emerged as Greece’s emergency response to a large number of unaccompanied children, we gradually evolved into an inclusive hub of coordinated action and a laboratory of new and path breaking ideas that operates in partnership with grass root organizations. A solid-state infrastructure that is ready to uphold the best interests of refugee children and sets a best practice example at a European level.

If I had to single-out the most emblematic and innovative response of our Secretariat that is indicative of our outreach and solution-driven approach to child protection, this would definitely be the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM). Leaving behind controversial and ‘last resort’ practices such as the so called ‘protective custody’, our NERM brings together experienced case managers of a tracing line, mobile units of streetworkers, information hubs, child protection experts at Regional Asylum Offices and six emergency accommodation facilities for more than 200 children. This ecosystem identifies and rescues thousands of refugee children in the mainland and also works proactively to empower them. Unaccompanied children that were suffering in silence in precarious living conditions, in homelessness, and perhaps exploitation.

Heracles Moskoff

Secretary Special for the Protection of the Unaccompanied Minors

A. The (Greek) National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) in a nutshell



B. Definitions

- Homeless unaccompanied child:

A third country national or stateless child deprived of parental care who a) stays in public or outdoor areas, without such area being considered a place of residence, b) stays overnight in sleeping hostels, without a permanent place of residence, or c) stays temporarily and for a short period in a homeless shelter. Precarious living conditions shall mean a) temporary accommodation with relatives or acquaintances, b) accommodation in unlawfully subleased or occupied premises, and c) accommodation in temporary or makeshift premises, such as improvised structures and cars.

- Emergency Accommodation Facilities:

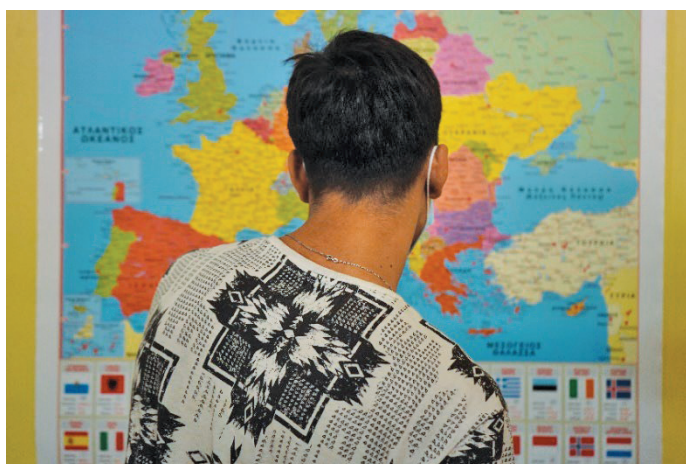
Appropriate place for temporary accommodation of unaccompanied children who are traced living homeless or in precarious living conditions that operates under the supervision of NERM. In emergency Accommodation Facilities comprehensive protection is provided (accommodation, psychosocial support, health care, legal assistance) and a framework for immediate assessment of UAC best interests assessment is conducted.

- Best Interests Assessment:

The standardized, holistic, and ongoing process by which unaccompanied children 's best interests is assessed. The assessment of UAC best interests takes place as soon as a child at risk is identified by trained professionals using specially designed tools through the holistic or urgent best interests form.

Unaccompanied child at the Arsis Info desk in Thessaloniki.

©SSPUAM/
Chrysoula
Patsou



List of acronyms

MoMA	Ministry of Migration and Asylum
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Refugee Agency
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
EU	European Union
SSPUAM	Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors
NERM	National Emergency Response Mechanism
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
NCR	Network for Children's rights
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
UAC	Unaccompanied children
BIA	Best Interests Assessment
GBV	Gender- Based Violence
PP	Public Prosecutor
RIS	Reception and Identification Service
NGO	Non- Governmental Organization
IGO	International Governmental Organization
RAO	Regional Asylum Office
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
PRDC	Pre- removal Detention Center
NFIs	Non-Food Items

C. Executive summary

- The National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUAM) of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum was launched in 2021 with the support of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, in Greece and institutionalized with article 66 (33) (ΑΓ) of Law 4939/2022 (OGG A' 111), which was added with article 39 of Law 4960/2022 (OGG A' 145).
- The purpose of the NERM is to identify and immediately refer and place a homeless unaccompanied child or a child living in precarious conditions in emergency accommodation facilities, pursuant to Article 43 of Law 4760/2020 (A 247) on the abolition of the protective custody of unaccompanied children.
- NERM includes a 24/7 tracing line, for identifying and tracing children in need. The tracing line provides guidance to children, citizens, local and public authorities on steps and actions to be taken from the point of identification of an UAC until his/her timely inclusion in emergency accommodation.
- NERM is tasked with the placement of the children in special emergency accommodation facilities and facilitating the relevant identification process, when necessary. For the time being, NERM undertakes all the necessary actions for the guardianship, as currently the temporary guardian is the Public Prosecutor, while the new guardian system of law with L. 4960/2022 will create a nexus of appointed guardians under the coordination of SSPUAM¹.
- Under this initiative, children are provided with material and psychosocial support, interpretation services, and safe accompaniment when outside the accommodation facilities, including representation during registration procedures with the authorities, through Mobile Units, and Information Desks established in Athens and Thessaloniki.
- UAC in the emergency accommodation receive specialized services and further support until they are transferred to long-term accommodation, based on a formal assessment of the child's needs (best interests assessment), background, and options available in Greece.
- A procedure for the proper registration and protection of unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine arriving in Greece has also been established since the end of March 2022, as the SSPUAM mobilized the NERM for these cases, as well.

¹ On 20.07.2022 a new legislation pertaining to the establishment of a national guardianship system for unaccompanied children, as well as a comprehensive accommodation system, was adopted by the Hellenic Parliament (Law 4960/2022; Govern. Gazette A' 145). The new legal framework creates a flexible and efficient guardianship system adapted to the needs of unaccompanied children, while at the same time is maintaining a high level of supervision and accountability.

NERM innovative measures and achievements:

- ✓ When a case of a UAC at risk is self-referred to the NERM's 24/7 tracing line, the caseworkers located at the Ministry conduct case management on the spot, employing interpretation via telephone.
- ✓ Close collaboration between all relevant stakeholders has been established and is running smoothly under the coordination of SSPUAM (Police, Public Prosecutor for Minors, the Asylum Service, the Reception and Identification Service, Hospitals, Municipalities, NGOs, IGOs) for a shared aim – the protection of UAC.
- ✓ For the first time, all traced UAC lacking documentation from a Greek authority go through a registration and identification process by the Police – thus no UAC remains “invisible”.
- ✓ UAC are included in safe accommodation within the same day of tracing, without having to go through time-consuming procedures (e.g. medical examinations prior to accommodation).
- ✓ A Best Interests Assessment is part of the Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) for every case of UAC traced by the NERM.
- ✓ UAC, while in emergency accommodation facilities, are informed about their rights and options and are provided with support to lodge an asylum application, in case this is in their best interests.
- ✓ More than 3.000 UAC have been included in a protective environment following tracing by the NERM between April 2021 and December 2022.
- ✓ NERM procedures constitute a protective measure against trafficking networks, protecting children on the move from exploitation and abuse.
- ✓ NERM has been mobilized for the unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine arriving in Greece by expanding its operation at the Promachonas border – the mainland border used by Ukrainian citizens arriving in Greece - and through the tracing line.

D. Introduction

The **Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors** (henceforth “SSPUAM”) was established at the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum in February 2020 and has been designated as the competent authority for the overall protection of third-country national or stateless children deprived of parental care while in Greece. Among the Special Secretariat’s most significant achievements have been the mass transfer of UAC from the Greek islands to appropriate accommodation in the mainland, the relocation of more than 1.000 UAC to the other EU Member States, the abolition of protective custody by law and practice, the enhancement of the accommodation system for UAC and the establishment of the **National Emergency Response Mechanism** for the protection of UAC in precarious living conditions (from now onwards “NERM”).



A member of a Mobile Unit looks for unaccompanied refugee children who are either homeless or living in precarious conditions near the train lines at the outskirts of Thessaloniki. ©UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis

E. Background

Lack of appropriate accommodation for UAC in Greece had led to the enforcement of the practice of protective custody for years. It was employed as an interim measure of protection, since otherwise children would be left in the streets. However, despite the purpose it served, this practice had led to judgments against Greece by the European Court of Human Rights and had been widely condemned by rights groups. Following the increased arrivals of asylum seekers in Greece as of 2015, among them many UAC with no proper support at the time, it became apparent that the establishment of a child protection system able to provide appropriate care to the UAC arriving in the country was necessary.

The SSPUAM focused on the implementation of the voluntary relocation scheme to other EU Member States and on a national action plan with immediate crisis responses, as well as short- and long-term goals and policies. This was Greece's first coordinated, comprehensive and multiannual strategic plan for an integrated framework for the care and protection of UAC in Greece² [National Strategy for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors 2021-2025]³. Even though efforts were made to find durable solutions, including relocation to other European countries, several unaccompanied children remained without secure shelter and were exposed to abuse, exploitation, and other risks.

The first step towards the improvement of the system of the reception conditions for unaccompanied children in Greece, was the abolition of protective custody with art. 43 of L. 4760/2020 (A' 247). According to par. 1, *“Unaccompanied minors, third-country nationals, or stateless persons shall not be placed in protective custody under Article 118 of P.D. 141/1991 (A' 58) only because they are deprived of safe or known residence. In this case, the Prosecutor for Minors or, failing that, the Prosecutor of First Instance, acting as the temporary Guardian for Unaccompanied Minors of their territorial jurisdiction, and the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum shall be informed without delay”*.

² [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)729356](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)729356)

³ <http://www.opengov.gr/immigration/?p=1607#comments>

In addition, according to par. 2, *“Third-country nationals or stateless persons who, following an identification procedure, are recognized as unaccompanied minors within the meaning of Article 2 of Law 4636/2019 (A’ 169), shall be referred without delay to a procedure for finding emergency accommodation through the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and shall be informed to that effect of the adoption of a transfer order”*.

Based on the above-mentioned legislation, SSPUAM and the UNHCR Office in Greece, designed and launched in 2021 the NERM. The objective of the NERM has been the immediate transfer of homeless or in precarious living conditions UAC to appropriate emergency accommodation facilities, providing, at the same time, a full protective net for their needs and rights, in accordance with their age.

In order to reach this population, the NERM has put in place an extraordinary procedure involving all responsible stakeholders for the protection of UAC in Greece, namely the Public Prosecutor for minors (or Public Prosecutor of First Instance), the Police authorities, the Reception and Identification Service, the Asylum Service and field actors with long experience and expertise on the protection of the specific population.

The results produced since the implementation of the NERM in 2021 have been highly imperative for the protection of UAC, since a protection and safety net has been established for those that are homeless or in precarious accommodation conditions, such as children temporarily accommodated by unrelated adults, living in squats or in makeshift constructions. As international literature and field research has shown, these children are at grave risk of falling victims to trafficking or smuggling networks and being subject to abuse, violence, or exploitation and may be trapped in forced labor, criminality, or sex work.



Due to lack of accommodation options and to avoid homelessness, unaccompanied children often end up staying in abandoned buildings.

*Abandoned house in the broader area of Thessaloniki, Northern Greece.
©UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis*

F. Components and procedure of the National Emergency Response Mechanism

The NERM's procedures implemented in the Prefectures of Attica and Thessaloniki are supported by two Information Desks and two Mobile Units, operated by the NGOs Network for Children's Rights and ARSIS in Attica and Thessaloniki, respectively. Furthermore, a "Best Interests Assessment" team has been operational by NGO ARSIS in the Promachonas border station, the main entry point of unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine in Greece.

The NERM's basic components and procedures are briefly described below, with an emphasis on the innovations and best practices introduced in the reception system for UAC in Greece.

1. Tracing line

The Tracing Line of the NERM⁴ is operating centrally at the SSPUAM by specially trained caseworkers and receives referrals from every actor in the field, the Greek authorities (Police, the Asylum Service, the Reception and Identification Service), civil society organizations, public healthcare facilities, refugee communities, private entities, municipalities, as well as citizens and UAC themselves.

The tracing line includes a landline number (0030-2132128888) and a mobile phone number (0030-6942773030), also available through WhatsApp and Viber applications. Communication with UAC who directly contact the line, is feasible via tele-interpretation provided by the NGO METAdrasi in six languages (Arabic, Farsi, Dari, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali) and others based on availability.

⁴ The Tracing Line was operating 24/7 (including public holidays) between April 2021 and June 2022. Due to operational limitations, though, the line since July 2022 up to date is operational Mon. – Fri., 08:00 -22:00 and Sat. 11:00 -19:00.

The NERM team at the SSPUAM’s premises receives referrals for UAC living in precarious conditions through the 24/7 tracing line that works also via WhatsApp and Viber applications.

*A NERM’s Case Worker while receiving a referral for a UAC and registering the case in the NERM’s platform.
©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou*



Upon receipt of each referral, the NERM caseworkers proceed immediately with every necessary action for the children to be transferred to designated emergency accommodation facilities, by providing relevant guidance and by coordinating all actors involved in the process, as per the NERM’s standard operational procedures (SOPs) and the relevant Case Management Protocol.

The **tracing line** has been operational since 05 April 2021 and up to 31 December 2022 has received in total **8.246 incoming communications** (namely by calls, e-mails, or text/WhatsApp/Viber messages):

Communication	CALL	EMAIL	TEXT MESSAGE - VIBER/WHATSAPP MESSAGES	GRAND TOTAL
1st Communication	3,813	2.550	263	6.626
Repeated⁵	1056	545	19	1,620
Total	4.869	3.095	282	8.246

⁵ Repeated: Two (2) and above communications which concern the same unaccompanied child but was either received by a different referring actor on the ground or was received by the same actor but at a different time.

As seen in the table below, most of the referrals to the NERM were made by Non-Governmental Organizations, followed by the Regional Asylum Offices and Police Departments around the country.

Communication	1st Communication	Repeated	GRAND TOTAL
ALLEGED_MINOR	19	0	19
CITIZEN	175	8	183
CITIZEN (UKRAINE)	543	3	546
HEALTH_INSTITUTION	15	3	18
IGO	51	16	67
NGO	2.126	713	2,839
OPEN ACC. FACILITY	239	19	258
OTHER	31	11	42
POLICE_DEPARTMENT	1.041	413	1,454
RAO	1.478	339	1,817
PRE-REMOVAL DETENTION CENTER	160	10	170
SELF REFERRED ADULT (UKRAINE)	75	0	75
SELF REFERRED UAM (UKRAINE)	4	0	4
SELF_REFERRED_ADULT	76	6	82
SELF_REFERRED_UAM	593	79	672
TOTAL	6.626	1,620	8.246

The referrals by the Police Departments concern mainly cases of UAC that have recently entered Greece and lack documentation or cases of UAC that have absconded from an accommodation facility they were previously residing and have been declared missing by the police authorities. In any case, the NERM is immediately notified by the police in order to proceed with all actions and to transfer the children to appropriate accommodation facilities.

Moreover, 518 UAC contacted the NERM directly between April 2021 and August 2022, mainly through the WhatsApp application. In these cases, the NERM caseworkers proceed to case management with the assistance of tele-interpretation. Following the first assessment, the information is transferred to the Mobile Units for the immediate tracing of the children and their transfer to safe accommodation. It is noteworthy that, **for the first time in the State child reception system, case management procedures are immediately activated in a coordinated manner when a UAC is communicating with the tracing line.**



A NERM's Case Worker while registering a referred UAC in the NERM's platform. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

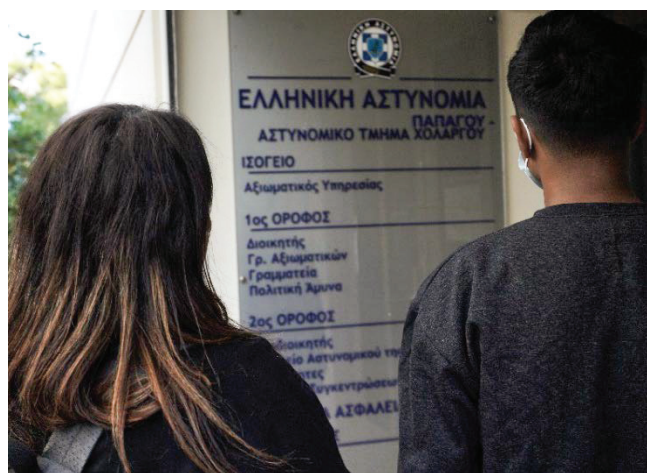
Finally, following the Ukrainian refugee emergency in 2022, **the SSPUAM mobilized the NERM also for the protection of unaccompanied and separated children arriving in Greece from Ukraine.** The tracing line was also activated for these cases and received 625 incoming communications from Ukrainian citizens fleeing to Greece.

2. Identification / Registration procedure

NERM has ensured that no UAC remains “invisible” to the national child protection system or outside a protection framework. Through the NERM all UAC present in the country undergo an official registration and identification process by a Greek competent authority.

Children referred to the NERM may either be identified for the first time by national authorities or may already possess identification documents issued by a Greek authority (Police, Reception and Identification Service, the Asylum Service). In case this is their first encounter with the Greek authorities then they have to be registered by the competent departments of the Hellenic Police.

Following close coordination with the Police HQ, the Division of Migration and Border Protection designated ten (10) **Police Departments of reference** in Attica and two (2) in Thessaloniki region as competent to undertake the registration/identification procedures of UAC identified through the NERM as living in precarious conditions, prior to their placement in emergency accommodation. For the proper implementation of the above procedure, NERM is in close collaboration with the Police Division of Migration and Border Protection.



Police Department of Reference ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

It is to be noted that, with a specific Administrative Order issued by the above Division and distributed to all police departments, the following procedure is followed:

- UAC who possesses any identification document issued by a Greek authority and has been traced by the police should be immediately referred to the NERM for direct transfer to an emergency accommodation facility.
- UAC who does not possess any identification document by a Greek authority should be transferred to a Police Department of reference (if not already present in one) in order to go through the registration and identification procedure, as applicable. The NERM is immediately notified in this case, as well, and the children are immediately transferred to accommodation facilities.

In both cases, the NERM notifies the Mobile Units run by implementing partners in order to proceed to the specific Police Department and transfer the child to the emergency accommodation facility indicated by the NERM.

The registration and identification procedure by the Police for the UAC who do not possess any documentation issued by a Greek authority constitutes a standard procedure before the placement of the child in an emergency accommodation facility. According to this procedure, any UAC who is traced by any actor other than the police is transferred with the support of the Mobile Units to the Police Departments of reference for registration purposes.

When the UAC already possesses relevant documentation, this step is omitted, and the child is directly transferred to an emergency accommodation facility.

When a UAC is traced in a rural area and not in the urban setting, the NERM coordinates with the Police so that the child is transferred to safe accommodation as soon as possible and following the registration/ identification procedure, if necessary.



Police Departments of Reference conduct the identification process for all unregistered UAC identified by the NERM.

*A Police Department of Reference while conducting the identification process of a homeless UAC.
©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou*

3. Information Desks

Two Information Desks are operated by the implementing partners of the NERM, the NGOs Network for Children's Rights and ARSIS, in Athens and in Thessaloniki respectively. The Information Desks, located in the cities' centres, are directly accessible to UAC arriving at their premises but are also receiving referrals from the NERM for assessment and further follow up of UAC individual cases.



The information desk of Arsis NGO in Thessaloniki. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

The teams working at the Info Desks are comprised of social scientists, lawyers and interpreters and are responsible for:

- supporting the tracing and registration of UAC referred by the NERM tracing line or who arrive directly at the NGO's premises;
- providing a set of services, namely psychosocial and legal support, to all children referred to them or identified through street-work;
- doing outreach activities (street-work) to identify children at risk;
- conducting needs assessments and referring the new cases that have arrived to the info desks to the NERM- SSPUAM, following the established standard operating procedures (SOPs).
- providing first aid for mental health and for covering other basic needs, with the provision of NFIs.

The Information Desks provide first aid support to the UAC, and they conduct a rapid best interests assessment to identify the individual needs for every UAC.

Unaccompanied children at the info desk of Thessaloniki while receiving psychosocial support.
©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou



The Info Desks are maintaining a continuous direct line of communication with the NERM daily but are also responsible for the regular reporting on all cases they have managed. The Info Desk caseworkers are also involved in street-work activities with the aim to approach UAC through their communities. During the street-work activities within the urban area, the NGO Partners are mainly locating UAC who stay in apartments with co-nationals known to them or other adults and wish to continue working rather than being included in a child protective environment. The teams endeavour to establish constant communication so that it becomes possible to check the environment in which the UAC live.



During a street work where experts speak with an unaccompanied child near the Thessaloniki train station about the program and the assistance it provides. © UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis.

4. Mobile Units



The mobile unit while escorting UAC to the police department of Reference, for the conduction of the Identification process. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

The NERM is also supported by two mobile units run by the same NGOs: Network for Children's Rights in Athens, and ARSIS in Thessaloniki. The mobile units, under the coordination of the NERM also conduct street-work activities and trace homeless children or children living in precarious conditions, while they conduct an initial assessment if necessary and provide psychosocial support. Upon tracing and following relevant instructions by NERM, the mobile units

accompany the children who are unregistered to the Police Departments of reference for identification and subsequently to the accommodation facilities.

The work of the Mobile Units has also proven vital for the proper implementation of the NERM, as they are the competent teams for concluding the registration and identification at the Police Departments of Reference and transferring the UAC to the emergency accommodation facility indicated by the NERM. The staff of the Mobile Units are present during the registration and identification at the Police Departments of reference and assist the process through in-person (onsite) or remote (phone) interpretation.

The **daily cooperation of NGOs** with child protection expertise **with the police authorities has been an innovation in the system**, introducing for the first time the ability of all stakeholders to work together for the same purpose, namely the immediate protection of UAC through their inclusion in proper accommodation facilities. Moreover, this is the first time that **UAC are strategically included in emergency accommodation facilities within the same day**, following excellent collaboration between all involved actors (State and non-state) and under the coordination of SSPUAM.



UAC after the completion of the identification process are accompanied to the emergency accommodation facility. ©SSPUAM Chrysoula Patsou

5. Emergency accommodation facilities



Emergency Accommodation Facility in Thessaloniki. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

The State designated the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to undertake the establishment and day-to-day operation of 200 places in emergency accommodation facilities, a project funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In the emergency accommodation facilities, UAC are provided with complete case management

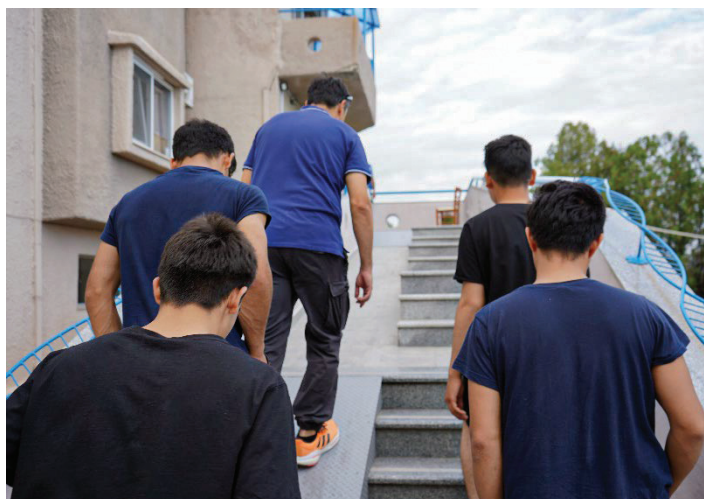
services, including psychosocial, legal and medical support, referrals to long-term accommodation and access to/assistance with their asylum procedure. The assessment of the best interests as well as the necessary medical examinations are concluded within three weeks in the emergency accommodation facility and UAC are transferred to long-term accommodation facilities.



The UAC are hosted in the emergency accommodation facilities for three weeks and afterwards they are transferred to permanent shelters or semi-independent living units.

The staff of the emergency facility in Thessaloniki while completing the BIA Form for a UAC, with the assistance of an interpreter. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

The revolutionary changes in the national reception system of UAC with the inclusion of the emergency accommodation facilities are the following three:



UAC arriving at the Emergency Accommodation Facility in Thessaloniki. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

- i. UAC are placed in the emergency accommodation facilities only with a COVID-19 test, as no other medical examinations are required in contrast to the prerequisites for the placement in long-term accommodation facilities (examinations for tuberculosis and scabies). Even when a UAC is found positive for COVID-19, he/she will be put in quarantine within the emergency accommodation facility, so that he/she does not remain homeless.
- ii. When in the emergency accommodation facility, the UAC receives hygiene and other essential items, proper case management services, including psychosocial, legal and medical support and the Best Interests Assessment is taking place before any transfer to a long-term accommodation facility.
- iii. For UAC who intend to apply for asylum, NERM is closely collaborating with the Asylum Service so that UAC, who are staying in emergency accommodation facilities, are prioritized to have their asylum application lodged within 3 weeks.



UAC at an Emergency Accommodation facility during the conduction of health assessment. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

All the aforementioned procedures (medical examinations, best interests assessment, registration with the Asylum Service and transfer to long-term accommodation facilities) should be completed in three (3) weeks. In this way, UAC receive holistic support in accordance with their needs and then transferred to long-term accommodation shelters after their best interest has been determined. In case of a UAC for

which doubts have been raised for the declared age, the completion of the age assessment is necessary prior to its transfer to the permanent shelter.

6. Response to Ukrainian refugee crisis

Following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, many unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine arrived in Greece, travelling either alone or with relatives or known (non-related) adults. The protection of these children has been a top priority for the EU, as they are at great risk of trafficking and exploitation. Therefore, it has been crucial for all Member States to be able to promptly identify them and ensure the appropriate provision of protection.



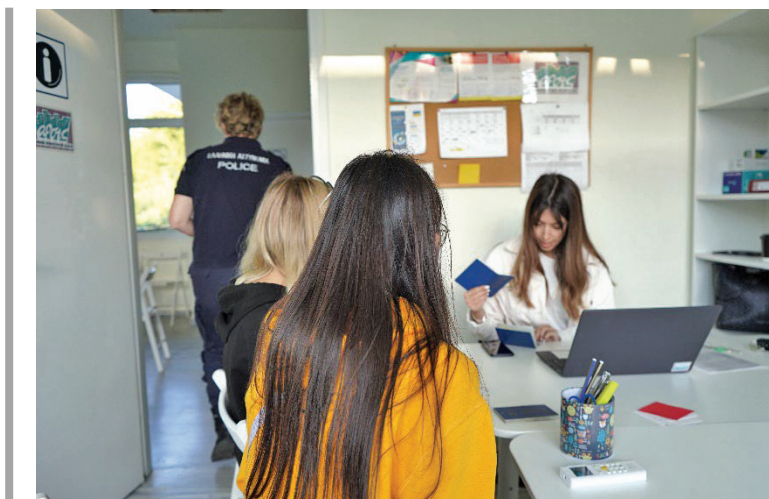
Promachonas land border is the main entry point in Greece for refugees from Ukraine. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou

A procedure for the proper registration and protection of unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine arriving in Greece has been established by the SSPUAM already since the end of March 2022 through the NERM. More specifically, the SSPUAM is in close cooperation with the Police and the co-competent bodies for the identification upon entry into Greece of unaccompanied or separated children from Ukraine. To this end, through the NERM tracing line and child protection teams, SSPUAM receives referrals, and coordinates actions for unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine.

To ensure the protection of these cases, the NERM reached an agreement with the Police Authorities at the Greek entry points and every case of unaccompanied or separated Ukrainian children entering Greece is immediately referred to the NERM, for further assessment. The police authorities refer the children to the NERM using a detailed notification form. The form is used to register the cases in which the separated child will be handed over by the accompanying relative to another relative in Greece, who will take care of him/her. The above form is sent to the NERM for further management and monitoring. This notification form has been distributed as a written order from the Headquarters of the Greek Police to the border police of all entry points in the country since 30 March 2022.

The Arsis BIA team assesses at the spot all the cases of Ukrainian UASC arriving at the land borders of Promachonas.

The border police at Promachonas closely collaborates with the Arsis BIA team for the proper assessment of the children from Ukraine. ©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou



In addition to the above and during the hours of high numbers of arrivals of Ukrainian citizens a Best Interests Assessment team has been deployed to the Promachonas border station, the main entry point of Ukrainian citizens entering Greece, by the Mechanism's implementing partner in Northern Greece. More specifically, the best interests assessment is conducted by ARSIS team for all cases of separated and unaccompanied children traced on the spot, in a child-friendly space and a relevant and detailed BIA report is prepared, which is subsequently sent to NERM for further management of the case.

Within this procedure, all actions are taken in order to verify the information provided and keep in record all relevant documentation for the proper follow-up of each case. In case there are serious and well-founded doubts concerning the suitability of the accompaniment or the safe arrival of the child at the place where he/she is to be hosted, the child is considered unaccompanied, and the police is notified accordingly.



*A case of a separated child from Ukraine, in Promachonas land border, after the completion of the rapid BIA from Arsis BIA team.
©SSPUAM/ Chrysoula Patsou*

After receiving the referral and the necessary documents, the NERM ensures the immediate housing of unaccompanied children, while the children accompanied by a relative or other known person, are referred either to the partners of the NERM or to the social services of the Municipalities at the place of residency for immediate follow up with regards to the best interests assessment and the registration procedures, while the competent Public Prosecutor

is notified in order to issue a prosecutorial order assigning temporary care of separated children only, if required.

Nevertheless, the cases of separated children for which a translated and certified notarial document assigning custody or temporary care by the parents in Ukraine to the relative or other known (non-related) adult in Greece is available, are not brought before a Prosecutor for issuing an order, as the above notarial documents are recognized as acts of assignment of care in force in the Greek legal order. The same applies to cases of children from Ukraine, who enter Greece with their parents and then the parents leave the country, entrusting the care of the child to a relative or other known (non-related) adult in Greece through a certified and translated document drawn up before the Ukrainian consulate authorities in Greece. If the notarial document exists, the case does not need to be brought before a Greek Public Prosecutor.

Unaccompanied children from Ukraine entering Greece are entitled to temporary protection according to the Ministerial Decision 172172/24-03-2022. With regards to the provision of temporary protection, NERM has established a relevant procedure with the Asylum Service so as to ensure that all unaccompanied and separated children receive the protection to which they are entitled. In this context, the above-mentioned documents are accepted for the registration of the separated children with the adults accompanying them.

This way it is ensured that all cases of unaccompanied and separated children are being registered appropriately from the first entrance. This procedure minimizes the risk of not identifying a case entering the Greek borders and above all, it works as a preventive measure against possible human trafficking networks.

Between 02 March and 31 August 2022, **3 unaccompanied and 485 separated children from Ukraine were referred to the NERM**. Moreover, 10 children previously residing in a Ukrainian institution have been accommodated in a shelter, along with their guardians from Ukraine.

7. NERM as a prevention measure against exploitation and abuse

The NERM aims at creating a safety net and offering protection to the most vulnerable of UAC, those who are homeless or in precarious accommodation conditions, and concomitantly **at risk of falling victim to abuse or exploitation**. The emergency mechanism stands as a preventive measure against trafficking by offering protection to a hitherto, largely undetected population, namely unaccompanied children who have entered Greece irregularly and most of them remain unregistered, not being able to access any services. It is a mechanism that aims at the timely identification of children in need or at risk, including child victims of trafficking, and that ensures immediate intervention and protection.

The population of UAC under the National Mechanism is considered as the population with the highest irregular mobility and is facing the danger of falling victim to trafficking or smuggling networks. **Since its inauguration on 5 April 2021 and until 31 August 2022, the Mechanism has managed to accommodate 2,148 UAC, following tracing on the street or a referral.** Moreover, it has managed to trace and offer protection to unaccompanied children, who were victims of trafficking or in great risk of falling victim to trafficking.



NERM stands as a preventive measure against GBV, including trafficking by offering immediate intervention and protection to unaccompanied children living in precarious conditions.

*Unaccompanied refugee children spotted near the railway area of Thessaloniki, Northern Greece.
©UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis*

The case of “Ali”

This case concerns a 16-year-old boy, who was traced to be homeless in the centre of Athens. The boy was born in Pakistan but had lost both his parents, while still very young. Around the age of 6, he was sold to a trafficking network, and was eventually taken to Turkey where he was then sold as a slave to a shepherd. Following several years under his control, during which he suffered from extreme violence, he managed to escape and come to Greece. Without previously going through reception procedures, he arrived in Athens where he was left homeless. The boy’s communication skills were extremely underdeveloped. He only remembered a few words in Urdu and some Turkish.

Upon tracing, the boy was immediately transferred to a safe environment, where he was provided with specialized psychosocial and legal services. Shortly after his placement in a shelter the boy entered the asylum procedure and was recognized as a refugee. At the same time, a referral was sent to the National Referral Mechanism for the protection of victims of human trafficking. The boy is currently living in a long-term accommodation facility.

** The name has been changed for protection reasons*

Baran*, a sixteen-year-old asylum-seeker from Iraq, managed to reach Thessaloniki in November 2021 after a perilous journey. Initially he shared an apartment with other asylum-seekers but eventually found himself homeless, until NERM provided him with essential support.



©UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis

The case of “Suleiman”, “Asad and “Qasim”

This case concerns the detection of three unaccompanied children from Pakistan who were located in the rural area of Lakonia, following a notification to the NERM Tracing Line by a citizen. The three children were reportedly staying in a derelict house with other adults and were working in the fields of the area, most possibly under conditions of forced labour.

Upon notification, the NERM alerted the local police authorities, which conducted an urgent search operation at the house. The police managed to trace the children, brought them to the police department and subsequently placed them in a safe accommodation facility.

** The names have been changed for protection reasons.*

As these examples demonstrate, the NERM is engaging proactively in the field and responding immediately to urgent cases, which need instant action.



Zabi*, a sixteen-year-old asylum-seeker from Afghanistan, left his country to escape war. After a long journey he eventually arrived in Thessaloniki in July 2021, unaccompanied and homeless. Thanks to the support he received from NERM he now dreams of a better future.

©UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis

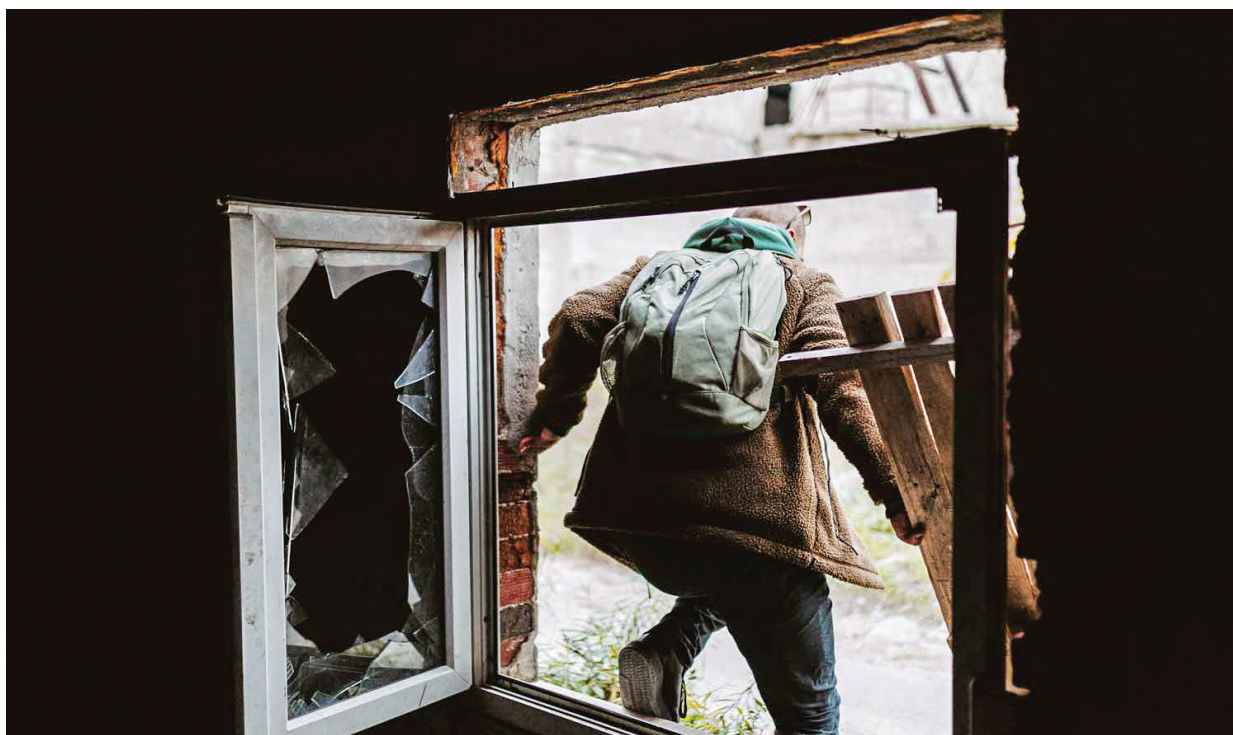
G. Coordination, Cooperation and Funding

The multiple components of NERM while coordinated by SSPUAM, are supported by UNHCR, EUAA, IOM and the European Union. Its operation on the ground is carried out through the NGOs ARSIS in Thessaloniki and Network for Children's Rights in Athens. Tele- Interpretation was provided through METAdrasi.

Cooperation with state authorities and agencies, namely the Hellenic Police, the Asylum Service, the Reception and Identification Service, Hospitals and Municipalities has ensured the effectiveness of the NERM, as well as the close collaboration established between all relevant stakeholders, public agencies, NGOs and IGOs.

The NERM's components, apart from the emergency accommodation facilities, are operating from January 2021 to December 2022 with the financial support of UNHCR and the European Union. From the 1st of January 2023, funding for NERM will be secured through EEA Grants.

The emergency shelters are currently run by IOM and are funded by the Danish Government.



A member of a Mobile Unit looks for unaccompanied refugee children who are either homeless or living in precarious conditions during a visit to various abandoned buildings at the outskirts of Thessaloniki.
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Last but not least, I would like to express my regards to the political leadership of the MoMA and especially to the Deputy Minister of MoMA, Ms Voultepsi, competent for the integration, for her constant support and guidance.

Heracles Moskoff

Secretary Special for the Protection of the Unaccompanied Minors

